



Informational Item
December 4, 2024

Item 6a

Information Item: **Status of the 30x30 Decision-Making Framework for Coastal Waters**

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Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Communities in the Face of Climate Change; Objective 1.3: Improve Understanding of Climate Impacts on California’s Coast and Ocean. Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions; Objective 2.1: Enhance Engagement with Tribes; Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities. Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity; Objective 3.1: Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems.

Exhibits:

Exhibit A: [30x30 Draft Decision-Making Framework for Coastal Waters](#)

Exhibit B: [The MPA Guide](#)

Exhibit C: [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures \(OECMs\)](#)

Exhibit D: [Inventory of Candidate 30x30 Conservation Areas](#)

Executive Summary:

California’s 30x30 initiative will create and expand enduring conservation measures across a broad range of landscapes and seascapes to protect biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change. OPC is leading implementation of 30x30 in coastal waters. In 2022, the California Natural Resources Agency released [Pathways to 30x30](#) (Pathways), which defines conservation for the purposes of 30x30 and details strategies and opportunities for

achieving the program’s goals. California’s statewide network of 124 marine protected areas (MPAs), which cover 16.2% of coastal waters, aligns with the definition of conservation set forth in Pathways. Conserving an additional half a million acres of coastal waters by 2030 will require action across four fronts: adaptively managing the state’s marine protected area (MPA) network; strengthening biodiversity conservation in National Marine Sanctuaries; supporting tribally led, such as through creation of Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas; and exploring the role of other spatial management measures to provide durable biodiversity benefits (e.g., areas established for the purposes of fisheries management or to improve water quality).

Understanding the biodiversity, access, and climate resilience benefits provided by marine managed areas can be complex. The international scientific community evaluated these challenges for many years and has developed robust tools for evaluating the effectiveness of marine protections, including the MPA Guide ([Exhibit B](#)) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) site-level tool for evaluating other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) ([Exhibit C](#)). Adapting this international guidance, with support by a Technical Advisory Panel convened in partnership with the California Ocean Science Trust, OPC has developed a draft science-based decision-making framework ([Exhibit A](#)) for evaluating and designating 30x30 Conservation Areas in coastal waters.

The [presentation](#) of the draft decision-making framework at the June 4, 2024 Council Meeting launched a 120-day public comment and tribal consultation period. This process engaged over a thousand people and included virtual webinars and in-person regional workshops in South, Central, and Northern California, as well as in-person tribal roundtables and government-to-government consultation meetings on the draft framework with California Native American tribes. Staff are working to integrate the comments received into the final framework and anticipate bringing a final framework to the Council for consideration of adoption at the March 3, 2025 Council Meeting. Following the adoption of the final framework, OPC staff will begin evaluating candidate 30x30 Conservation Areas and work to identify potential new conservation measures to address major threats to biodiversity in coastal waters, in partnership with agencies, tribes, and local communities.

Background

In October 2020, Governor Newsom issued [Executive Order N-82-20](#), which advanced biodiversity conservation as an Administration priority and elevated the role of nature in fighting climate change. Part of this Order committed California to conserving 30% of its lands and coastal waters by 2030 (the “30x30” initiative) – putting California at the leading edge of an international movement to protect nature. For the purposes of California’s 30x30 initiative, an area is

considered a “30x30 Conservation Area” as defined in Pathways if it meets the following definition: **“Land and coastal water areas that are durably protected and managed to sustain functional ecosystems, both intact and restored, and the diversity of life that they support.”**

California’s statewide network of 124 marine protected areas (MPAs), which cover 16.2% of coastal waters, aligns with the definition of conservation set forth in Pathways. However, California’s coastal waters are a complex mosaic of overlapping marine managed areas that vary widely in purpose, level of protection, managing agency, and potential biodiversity benefits.

Decision-Making Framework for 30x30 in Coastal Waters

Understanding the conservation benefits provided by marine managed areas can be complex. The international scientific community has grappled with these challenges for many years and has developed robust tools for evaluating the effectiveness of marine protections, including the MPA Guide (Exhibit C) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) site-level tool for evaluating other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) (Exhibit D). OPC and the 30x30 Technical Advisory Panel have integrated both resources into a draft decision-making framework (Exhibit B) tailored to California.

The draft framework laid out a process to evaluate candidate 30x30 areas in coastal waters in California. Acknowledging the diversity and complexity of marine managed areas in California, the framework provides guidance both for areas established explicitly for the purposes of biodiversity conservation (e.g. California’s MPA network, National Marine Sanctuaries) as well as areas established for purposes other than biodiversity conservation (e.g. areas established to protect water quality or promote the recovery of depleted fish stocks).

For areas that were established primarily for the purposes of biodiversity conservation, biodiversity protections will be evaluated using the MPA Guide. The MPA Guide is a science-based, policy-relevant framework to help understand, evaluate, and plan marine protected areas (MPAs) and assess their expected outcomes for nature and people. Per the draft framework, ‘lightly,’ ‘highly,’ and ‘fully’ protected areas would qualify as 30x30 Conservation Areas.

For areas that were created for primary reasons other than biodiversity, biodiversity protections will be evaluated using the IUCN OECM Site Level Tool tailored for California. Evaluation of these areas offers a significant opportunity to recognize the effective long-term conservation and durable protections that are taking place to protect habitats and species. Per the draft evaluation framework, areas that qualify as OECMs would qualify as 30x30 Conservation Areas.

Moving forward, the framework is also intended to support identification of potential new conservation measures to address major threats to biodiversity in coastal waters, to be designed

and implemented in partnership with state and federal agency partners, California Native American tribes, coastal communities, conservation organizations, fishermen, and others.

Public Comment and Tribal Consultation Period

The [presentation](#) of the draft decision-making framework at the June 4, 2024 Council Meeting launched a 120-day public comment and tribal consultation period. Following that meeting, OPC conducted robust outreach to solicit feedback on the draft framework starting with two kickoff webinars in July and concluding at the in-person 30x30 Partnership Summit held in Sacramento in October 2024. In-person workshops held in San Diego, Monterey, and Arcata provided interested members of the public with an important opportunity to provide feedback on the draft framework, discuss local threats to coastal and marine biodiversity, and identify ways in which 30x30 could support conservation in their region. OPC hosted two workshops and two tribal roundtables in each location, and also held four virtual public webinars throughout the summer, resulting in hundreds of individual conversations on 30x30 and the draft decision-making framework. Throughout the summer, OPC staff also presented to National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils, met with fishing and NGO coalitions, and deepened partnerships with state and federal agency partners.

More than one thousand people contributed comments on the draft framework, either through attendance at the workshops or through online submission. OPC received 23 public comment letters from over 60 organizations and tribes, representing a diverse coalition of California academic, NGO, environmental justice, tribal and fishing organizations and communities. In addition, OPC staff directly communicated with 14 tribes through tribal roundtables and government-to-government consultation on the draft framework. Finally, OPC staff had the unique opportunity to discuss the draft decision-making framework with key international partners through attendance of the United Nations Biodiversity Summit in Cali, Colombia in October 2024.

Public Comment Key Takeaways:

Although the priorities and concerns expressed by Californians during the public comment and tribal consultation period varied widely, several consistent themes emerged:

- Biodiversity should be the main priority for advancing 30x30
- Concerns about inclusion of ‘lightly protected’ MPAs as 30x30 Conservation Areas given their biodiversity benefits relative to fully and highly protected MPAs
- Need for integrating Traditional Knowledges into the decision-making framework and evaluation process and clearer guidance for state actions toward supporting Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas

- Emphasis on the importance of water quality and the need to address land-based threats
- Importance of watersheds, estuaries, and land-sea connection
- Concern about potential loss of access and recommendation to assess types of access for their quality, community benefits, and impact to biodiversity
- Importance of considering climate resilience and mitigation benefits of 30x30 Conservation Areas
- Concerns about enforcement efficacy and other on-the-ground needs within marine managed areas
- Concerns about offshore wind impacts to coastal/marine resources
- Beyond designation as a 30x30 Conservation Area: What comes next?

OPC staff values the insightful feedback received during the public comment period and are currently reviewing all submissions to thoughtfully incorporate this input into the final framework. OPC is also undertaking the following actions based on public and tribal feedback:

- Re-assessing the role of access and climate considerations in the decision-making framework.
- Working with state fisheries managers and representatives of the fishing community to tailor the MPA Guide to the California management context.
- Continuing and expanding collaboration with agency partners to ensure broad, consistent integration of 30x30 into management priorities across the state.
- Looking more closely at land-based threats that impact coastal and marine health.
- Working to better integrate tribal perspectives and Traditional Knowledges into the final decision-making framework and evaluation process.

Next Steps and Evaluation/Designation Process for 30x30 Conservation Areas

Prior to releasing the final framework, OPC will continue to hold meetings with key partners, including environmental justice advocates, California Native American tribes, coalitions of recreational and commercial fishermen, and state and federal agencies. OPC will also review and consider any comments on the framework, or 30x30 in coastal waters more broadly, received at the December 9, 2024 Council Meeting. Staff anticipate bringing a final framework to the Council for consideration and possible adoption at the March 3, 2025 Council Meeting.

After the adoption of the framework, OPC will begin evaluating candidate areas for 30x30. OPC will begin by evaluating marine managed areas included in the [inventory](#) of potential candidate 30x30 Conservation Areas. These include National Marine Sanctuaries, state water quality protection areas, underwater state parks, fisheries management areas, UC research reserves and

more. Results of these evaluations are expected to be available by Summer 2025. Based on the results of this evaluation, OPC will also begin identifying potential new conservation measures to address major threats to biodiversity in coastal waters based on the best available science and in partnership with agencies, tribes, and local communities.

All evaluations will be conducted by OPC staff in close collaboration with relevant agency partners, mirroring the process for land-based 30x30 Conservation Areas in the California Protected Areas Database (CPAD) and the California Conservation Easement Database (CCED) databases. New 30x30 Conservation Areas will be announced in annual [Pathways Progress Reports](#) and OPC staff looks forward to sharing progress with the Council at regular intervals.